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ABSTRACT

"Politically correct" has become an all-purpose pejorative epithet conflating and condemning a number of initiatives, such as affirmative action in hiring and admissions, multicultural education, broadening the "canon" of classical texts to include women and minority groups, protests against unpopular, usually conservative ideas, and changing vocabularies for representing particular groups. Kenneth Burke's elaboration of five distinct variations on the meaning of the simple word "dog" suggests a method by which the complex issues surrounding the term "politically correct" might be analyzed. Thus a, systematic application of Burke's notion of "Dramatism" can be made to the politically correct controversy. There are five different canine categories, then, concerning the notion of politically correct: (1) the hegemonic dog, emphasizing the different terminologies used by advocates of both sides; (2) the ancestral dog, which decenters the individual canine-hominid bond by placing it in a broader collective-tribal context; (3) the antinomial dog, which emerges from basic contradictions inherent in the controversy; (4) the hierarchical dog, especially the dog as breeder, representing Dramatism at its most formal level; and (5) the "multivocal" dog. This final category, suggested by Burke's presentation of the four rungs on the educational ladder, is the culmination of the mature learner, who treats different texts as voices in a dialogue. Texts, then, become more like equipment for living and thinking, rather than merely medicinal pills producing health. (Contains 19 references.) (HB)

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THE FIVE DOGS OF POLITICALLY CORRECT SPEECH ON CAMPUS

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The Five Dogs of Politically Correct Speech on Campus

Among the more discomforting criticisms levelled at Dramatism is the claim that Kenneth Burke's theory is a "monument of personal inventiveness and ingenuity" which "has been utterly without influence in its fundamental lessons[1]." In a scholarly community which privileges systematic inquiry, Burke's writings sometimes seem idiosyncratic and his methods "elusive.[2]"

For this occasion I wish to propose a serious language game as a vehicle for a systematic application of Dramatism to a particularly "logological" controversy in the American Academy. "Politically correct," or PC, has become an all-purpose pejorative epithet which conflates and condemns affirmative action in hiring and admissions; multicultural education; broadening the "canon" of classical texts to include works by women, minority groups, and non-Western authors; campus protests against unpopular, usually conservative, ideas; changing vocabularies for representing particular groups (e.g., "people of color"); and, in some universities, emphasizing research over undergraduate teaching. The controversy has received widespread attention in national periodicals, inspired at least three popular books, led to the formation of a watchdog group called the National Association of Scholars, and been singled out in a speech by President Bush at the University of Michigan last May.

The analytical framework proposed here is rooted in the last section of "Mind, Body, and the Unconscious," in which Burke contrasts his own analysis of "symbolic action" with Freud's use of that term.[3] Having

explored a number of differences between these two domains, Burke ends the essay by elaborating five Dramatistic variants on the term "dog."

> First, along psychoanalytic lines, there is the "primal dog, the first dog you knew, or loved, or were frightened by, or lost. . .
>
> Next there's the "jingle" dog. It concerns the sheerly accidental nature of the *word* dog, what it rhymes with in English as distinct from what the corresponding word rhymes with in other languages. . .
>
> Third, comes the "lexical" dog. This is the one defined in the dictionary, "by genus and differentia." It is the most public, normal, and rational of all dogs--and the emptiest of all, as regards the attitude of either poets or neurotics. . .
>
> Fourth,there's the "entelechial" dog. This is the "perfect" dog *towards which* one might aspire. . .
>
> Finally, there is the "tautological" dog. We here have in mind the fact that a dog involves a particular set of associations which, in a sense, reproduce his spirit.[4]

Taking full advantage of the "resources of substitution[5]" inherent in symbol-using, I wish to propose five *different* canine categories useful in exploring the controversy over "politically correct" speech. The game stems from Burke's comment --apparently offhand, but one can never be certain-- that "Lassie," a media fiction if there ever was one, is "Machinery's primary exhibit" of the entelechial dog. Hence I would propose an example of each category of dog presented here.

I

On the surface the PC debate seems particularly vitriolic. Characterizations of the academic left as "terrorists" whose tactics of intimidation warrant "Counterterror[6]" are parried with accusations that the anti-PC forces are engaged in a right-wing "mopping-up" operation by undermining the one remaining oasis of "institutional dissidence" left in the country--colleges and Universities[7]. A story by the German ethologist

Konrad Lorenz in *Man Meets Dog* might serve as a representative anecdote here[8]. Lorenz tells of two dogs, one fenced in a yard and one who would pass by the fence each day. Both dogs would run along the fence snarling, growling, and carrying on as if to say that only the presence of the fence kept them from a ferocious attack on one another. One day a section of the fence collapsed. Both dogs began their threatening ritual, only to come face-to-face with one another at the broken section. After a moment's confusion, both dogs ran to the next unbroken section of fence and started the tumult again. The differing terminologies employed by advocates in the PC debate serve as a safe boundary for both groups. Hence I call this first category the "hegemonic" dog, and propose as its exemplars both Denish d'Souza's English terrier and Stanley Fish's black Labrador.

II

The "ancestral" dog, a larger cousin of Burke's "primal" hound, de-centers the individual canine-hominid bond by placing it in a broader collective-tribal context. Jackals in the shadows of tribal campfires in the African savannahs prefigure contemporary images of Rover asleep in front of the fireplace. Similarly, modern hunting and sheep-gathering "partnerships" between humans and working canines echo refrains of wolves and fur-clad spear carriers chasing a wooly mammoth over a cliff. These partnerships, a critical perspective might contend, are anchored more in relations of dominance and exploitation than equality. Ancestral wildness having been domesticated and indeed stigmatized--ideological analysis of connotative themes encoded in the "pooper-scooper" providing insights here--a need arises to recover the "natural dog" buried under the canons of

domesticity. Robert Bly's Pomeranian on a "Wildman weekend" would exemplify the ancestral dog.

III

Thematically, the PC critique seems strangely familiar. By exposing the ideological agenda beneath a rhetoric of pluralism, critics of "the New McCarthyism" on college campuses galvanize popular opposition to University-based cultural critics.by using the tools of cultural criticism. Decrying the dominant influence of dead white European males such as Marx, Freud, Foucault and Derrida in the humanities and social sciences[9], the anti-PC gang seeks to restore to the center of academic study such marginalized figures as Matthew Arnold, Plato, and William Shakespeare. From these contradictions emerges the "antinomial" dog. Although cataloguing the paradoxes of PC is a larger task than can be undertaken here, some comic antinomies (i.e., ironies) of the topic are at hand. The term "politically correct" originated in North American middle-class socialism as "a way of joking one's way into honesty, of refusing to forget the distance between the social life we led and the life we could only imagine.[10]" Burke himself suffered a kind of vilification at the hands of the American Writer's Congress in 1935, after arguing in "Revolutionary Symbolism in America" that the term *people* was more rhetorically advantageous for revolutionaries than the term *worker*; the thrust of this hostility, although the contemporary label was not used, was that his thesis was not "politically correct.[11]"

Back to the current metaphor, however. Embedded in the "family pet" relationship between human and canine is a paradox of primitive and totemic anthropomorphism. Family pets are treated as beloved children who never

quite seem to master toilet training, while human adolescents become surly unkempt curs who lose their enthusiasm for the cute tricks parents find so endearing. A generation ago Dick Gregory argued in an anti-war speech that if the government suddenly decided to conscript family dogs, American mothers and fathers would rise up in violent opposition to such a policy; subjecting their sons to the dangers of war, however, was met with quiescence. The obvious exemplar here is "Hooch," from the movie *Turner & Hooch*--a postmodern Rin Tin Tin.

IV

The "hierarchical" dog represents Dramatism at its most formal and conventional. Purification mystification, and the scapegoat thematize the rhetoric of the anti-PC movement. Restoration of American competitiveness, it is argued, requires a turning back in higher education to the timeless truths embedded in the canon. Yet a post-*Rhetoric of Motives* Burke would foreground the pervasiveness of the Negative in any terminological scheme. Any attempt to purify and perfect the Academy's curriculum must be "rotten" because the Negative lurks in every instance of symbolic action. Purification in this arena, as a move upward to a more "essential" set of texts, resonates with the metaphor of the "breeder" which figures so centrally in John Campbell's analysis of Charles Darwin's rhetoric[12]. Here the focus is on breeders of dogs, however, not the Deity likened to breeders of sheep. Attempts to purify a breed through careful husbandry have led, at least in the case of large dogs, to syndromes like hip dysplasia, a deformity of the hindquarters which makes for a nasty, brutish, and short life. So, too, in the PC debate one suspects that any attempted

purification of language (e.g., "womyn" or "Great Books" curricula) invokes its own negations (an anti-feminist backlash or a run on Cliff Notes). An example of the hierarchical dog would be David Duke's German Shepherd--with hip dysplasia, of course.

V

Ultimately the PC debate revolves around the purpose of higher education in the United States. If the mission of colleges and universities is merely to provide educated workers for employers, the dispute can have only one resolution. As Burke noted in a rarely-read essay providing a Dramatistic perspective on education, even "humanistic" education can become "the attempt to teach and to acquire the kind of 'insignia' that are thought to be proof of cultural election.[13]" Hence a literary canon is prescribed for pragmatic reasons--to help separate prospective members of the cultural and corporate elite from their boorish peers.

Later in this same essay Burke proposed a Dramatistic hierarchy of educational philosophies--presented as rungs in an educational ladder. The lowest rung would be "a mode of 'indoctrination' designed to assert a narrowly partisan point of view in subjects of a 'controversial' nature." The second rung would include "something of other views, because such knowledge would better equip [the student] to combat them." Next would be a more "humanitarian" view, which would "seek to describe and 'appreciate' other groups." Finally, the fourth rung would treat differing perspectives as "voices in a dialogue." From this vantage point "one hopes for ways whereby the various voices, in mutually correcting one another, will lead toward a position better than any one singly[14]."

The fundamental flaw in the heated and acrimonious debate over PC is, in Katha Pollett's words, that it treats literature as if it were *medicinal;* in a student culture in which an "independent reading life" is a fiction, "the canon debate is really an argument about what books to cram down the resistant throats of a resentful captive population of students[15]." To think of books as "pills that produce health when ingested in measured doses[16]" is simply wrong-headed. Instead, following Burke, we should identify the fourth rung as "the most mature of the lot, and the one that would surely be aimed at, in an ideal world of civilized and sophisticated people[17]." Instead of arguing about what particular set of books constitute the core of education, we need to be asking about the factors that interfere with students' access to the various voices continuing "the Great Conversation." Tim Brennan argues that the primary inhibiting factor is "the media and a corporate popular culture--sites we have barely begun to criticize, or to teach others to criticize, in any systematic way in the university[18]."

Since one of Burke's original contributions to rhetoric was to open the door to the rhetorical analysis of cultural artifacts other than speeches, Dramatistic analysis of media and corporate popular culture would be a logical continuance of this tradition. In addition, Burke's inclusion in the recent rehabilitation of American pragmatist philosophers by Richard Rorty and Cornell West is an important project for followers of "logology." West in particular frames American pragmatism as a reaction to the epistemological quagmires of modern European thought[19]. West's call for a "prophetic pragmatism" and a return to a vision of the socially active or "organic" intellectual proposed by C. Wright Mills and W.E.B. Dubois undergirds a Dramatistic approach to education which examines "literature

as equipment for living" in a diverse array of texts. Hence, finally, the "multivocal" dog, epitomized by Cornel West's pack of pound puppies.

NOTES

1. Frederic R. Jameson, "The Symbolic Influence; or, Kenneth Burke and Ideological Analysis," in Hayden White and Margaret Broase (eds.), *Representing Kenneth Burke* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1982), p. 70.

2. Frank Lentricchia, "Reading History with Kenneth Burke," in White and Broase, p. 121.

3. *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1968), pp. 63-80.

4. This synopsis is from Herbert Simons, "Introduction: Kenneth Burke and the Rhetoric of the Human Sciences," in Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia (eds.) *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1989), p. 24.

5. Burke, "Definition of Man," in *Language as Symbolic Action*, p. 7.

6. Eugene Genovese, "Heresy, Yes--Sensitivity, No," *The New Republic*, April 15, 1991, 32.

7. Tim Brennan, "'PC' and the Decline of the American Empire," *Social Policy*, Summer 1991, 25.

8. Translation by Marjorie Kerr Wilson.

9. Debra Cermele, "The Political Seduction of the University,"*Campus: America's Student Newspaper*, Winter 1991, 3.

10. Brennan, 17.

11. Frank Lentricchia, "Analysis of Burke's Speech," in Simons and Melia, pp. 281-82.

12. John A. Campbell, "The Polemical Mr. Darwin," *QJS*, 61, 4 (1975), 375-90.

13. Burke, "Linguistic Approach to the Problem of Education," in Nelson B. Henry (ed.), *Modern Philosophies and Education* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 271.

14. Burke, "Linguistic Approach to the Problem of Education," p. 283.

15. Katha Pollett, "Reading Books, Great or Otherwise," *Harper's*, December 1991, 36.

16. Pollett, p. 36.

17. Burke, "Linguistic Approach to the Problem of Education," p. 384.

18. Brennan, 25.

9. Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: U of Wisconsin Press, 1989).